

## *Session 1: Forging a Culture Where the Book of Revelation is Treasured*

### I. **SETTING A CORPORATE VISION TO FORGE A CORPORATE CULTURE: AWAKENING TO THE BEAUTY OF JESUS & THE REALITY OF HIS RETURN**

- A. Over the next year we're going to search out the book of Revelation in an intentional, deliberate and focused way. Our goal though is not simply to understand it intellectually. That is important and we want that. But that is secondary. **We want to forge a culture.** To forge means: *to “establish with effort: to establish and strive to develop something with great effort.”*<sup>1</sup> We're being invited by the Lord into something much greater than we could ever have imagined; we're called to lay our lives down to establish a “watering-hole” where the masses will soon flock when the season shifts; people need answers in crisis. But this will take time, energy, risk, courage, sacrifice and an alien grace to sustain us.
- B. There are many places on the earth where individuals can be taught how to understand the book; accurately and erroneously. But there are few places on the earth where individuals can be immersed into a culture where they can submit to the process of inward formation that is mandatory for the emergence of the forerunner ministry. We want to fight for the establishment of that environment so that forerunners can be forged. That is what is unique about our context. We're called not to simply learn books of the Bible but to raise up forerunners who will prepare the earth for the return of Jesus.
- C. In this unique hour of history God is awakening the church to **the beauty of Jesus** (*His person and work*) and **the reality of His return** (*the reality of the implications of the end of this age and the beginning of the next under Jesus' leadership*). Without doubt these are two of God's greatest priorities in our generation (Rev. 1:1). It's what will catalyze the greatest redefining of the expression of Christianity in all of church history.

<sup>1</sup> Encarta® World English Dictionary © & (P) 1998-2004 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.



- D. Over the next decade we're going to set ourselves in a very intentional way to pave the way ***for tens of thousands of young adults in the southern hemisphere to encounter the beauty of Jesus and the reality of His return.*** It's going to be difficult and it's going to be costly. But it will be worth it. Think of the multitudes that labored to dig the Panama Canal linking the Gulf of Mexico with the Pacific. Many spent the prime years of their lives in muddy yellow fever infested trenches laboring to enable the next generation to access that which was nearly impossible to access in their own generation. We're laboring for our peers and children to access that which is now seemingly impossible for our generation: ***Authentic passion for Jesus and for His return.***
- E. In this session we're going to look at the opening verses of this profound gift from God called "the book of Revelation." In these first verses we're told, (1) the nature of the book, (2) the central message of the book, (3) the contents of the book and (4) a clear statement about what God's people are to do with it. These four concepts will serve as a springboard into all that we're moving towards and will be our "pillars" that we must put in place to build a culture around.

## II. THREE FOUNDATION PRESUPPOSITIONS

**What is culture built upon? – Values.** Every culture is predicated on specific values. Those values govern and dictate the culture. There are three key values, or presuppositions, that compel us in this direction. In other words, the conviction of these three realities drive us to labor on behalf of this nation in light of what's coming. And, in order to approach the book we need a foundation to set our exegesis upon. So in this session I want to present three foundational premises that we need to acknowledge and agree upon for this ministry to flourish as God intends.

- A. We're Living in a Transitional Generation that will Culminate with the Return of the Lord

1. Jesus unequivocally commands us to know the hour of His return. The false idea that Jesus discourages us from knowing the timing of His return needs to be thoroughly addressed and forcefully (yet humbly) refuted.

***When you see all these things, KNOW that it is near--at the doors! Assuredly...this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place... (Mt. 24:33-34)***



2. When Jesus said that “no one knows the day or the hour” in Matthew 24:36 He said it to encourage us to know the hour of His return not to discourage it. The Lord said that statement in context to the disciples question about the signs of the timing of His coming. After giving the global trends that will be unique to the final generation (24:4-14) He explained how there would be a catalytic event in the Middle East that would trigger the final 3 ½ years of history known as “the great tribulation” (24:15-22). After that Jesus told over half a dozen parables about how and why we are required to know the hour of His return and be prepared for it (24:32-25:46).
  
3. Jesus gave only two conditions that must be met before His return. We are the first generation that has seen them met. The return of Jesus is contingent upon (1) the establishment of a Jewish nation-state that culminates in an age-ending siege of Jerusalem and (2) the proliferation of the Gospel to all nations.
  
4. No generation since the generation of the apostles can say with absolute certainty that the return of Jesus is possible. In view of the intensifying geo-political context surrounding Israel, it’s clear that we are approaching the beginning of the end. In fact, we are required to conclude that and declare that.
  
5. We need to be convinced of the fact that we are supposed to know the hour of His return. Why else would Jesus use the word “know” so much in Matthew 24 if we aren’t supposed to know? And why build a case for knowing by the declaration of all the timing indicators (Matthew 24:4-42) if we’re not supposed to pay attention to them and draw conclusions from them?

***“When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you KNOW that summer is near.” (v. 32)***

***“When you see all these things, KNOW that it is near--at the doors”! (v. 33)***

***“Of that day and hour no one KNOWS...” (v. 36)***



***“...they were eating and drinking and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark and did not KNOW until the flood came and took them all away...” (v. 38-39)***

***“Watch therefore, for you do not KNOW what hour your Lord is coming...” (v. 42)***

***“But KNOW this, that if the master of the house had KNOWN what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into...” (v. 43)***

6. The Book of Revelation is a gift from God to the generation that witnesses this age-ending transition. The Book of Revelation is not about things that happened in the Roman Empire in 70 AD. Nor is it all useless symbolism. Nor is it a vague and arbitrary account of the struggle between good and evil. The book contains information that is necessary to sustain the people of God through the coming storm. Not only are we supposed to know the hour of His return, we’re supposed to be a responsive Bride who submits to her Husband and obeys Him.

B. God is Raising Up the Forerunner Ministry

1. In view of the urgency of the hour that we are living in, God is raising up the forerunner ministry in His mercy to prepare the nations of the earth for the return of the Lord.

***...for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.” (Luke 1:15-17)***

2. Forerunners are those who are anointed to prepare the way of Jesus’ return. Those who have been marked with the same grace and anointing that John the Baptist was marked with are alive right now on the earth and are being commissioned with the same call that John heard:

***And I was told, “You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.” (Revelation 10:11)***



3. In our midst God is going to cultivate, nourish and mature the prophetic anointing. In fact, in the mind of God, the main reason – among many – that the House of Prayer reality is emerging on the earth is for the cultivating of the forerunner ministry.

***So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." (John 1:22-23)***

***The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God...The glory of the LORD shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together (at Jesus' Second Coming)... (Isa. 40:3-5)***

***Prepare the way for the people; build up the highway! Take out the stones, lift up a banner for the peoples! Say..., "Surely your salvation is coming..." (Isa. 62:10-11)***

C. God is Raising Up a Global Prayer Movement

1. In view of the coming glory and horror associated with the closing of this age God is committed to setting adequate leadership in place. And the way in which God is going to prepare these leaders is in the place of day and night prayer. One of the most prominent trends that we will witness in the church over the next few decades will be the transformation of the methodology of church. Before the Lord returns, the church globally will be identified from heaven and earth as being a "house of prayer."

***It is written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer"... (Mt. 21:13)***

***Now shall not God bring about justice for His elect, who cry to Him day and night...? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them speedily.* (Lk. 18:7-8; NAS)**

2. Lifestyles of prayer and fasting are mandatory for those who are called to the forerunner ministry. The priority for those who are called to this ministry is radical inward transformation that comes as a result of gazing upon the beauty of Lord in a focused and sustained way.



***One thing I have desired of the LORD...that I may dwell in the house of the LORD...to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple. (Ps. 27:4)***

3. The optimum environment for forerunners to grow is in the place of prayer. Thus, the plan of God for this city and for this global family that we are a part of is to establish day and night prayer for the formation of prophetic messengers.
4. We *must* labor to forge a culture here unto the establishing of a context and an environment where these forerunners can grow.

***And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel. (Luke 1:80)***

***In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. (Luke 3:1-2)***

***But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. (Galatians 1:15-2:1)***

- D. These three foundational truths are necessary to connect with in order to rightly understand, respond to and position ourselves under the realities contained in the book of Revelation.



- E. To say it simply: We are living at the end of the age. And because of this, God is committed to establishing the forerunner ministry in this generation. And the forerunner ministry requires lifestyles of prayer and fasting.

### III. THE PROLOGUE (1:1-3): FOUR FOUNDATIONAL TRUTHS ABOUT THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The first statements of the book in this Prologue are meant to grip us and direct us. These verses tell us how we're supposed to view and handle the rest of the Book. Most erroneous teaching on the book of Revelation is addressed in these 3 verses.

*“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.”  
(Revelation 1:1-3)*

- A. The Nature of the Book

*“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants...”  
(1:1a)*

1. Before it is anything to us, anything that pop-culture Christianity tells us it is, it is first and foremost the Revelation that God gave Jesus for His saints to receive. The object being revealed in the book is Jesus, the source of revelation in the book is God the Father and the recipient of this revelation is the Wife of the Lamb; the saints.
2. This book is:
  - a. **A Revelation of the Son of God** – The conjunction of “ἀποκάλυψις” and “Ἰησοῦς” suggests that we read the verse so as to mean “the revelation about Jesus” or “the revelation of Jesus.” Some argue that it should be understood as “the revelation from Jesus.” They argue that “Jesus is not the subject of the book but the author.”<sup>2</sup> While we

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<sup>2</sup> Geisen, pg. 56; 1997



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affirm that Jesus is the author of the book, we are correct to also affirm that Jesus is the subject of the book also. The book of revelation is most principally about how Jesus is going to close this age and inaugurate the next. The book of Revelation contains the clearest picture of Jesus' person, plan and power in orchestrating history bringing to a glorious consummation. At the outset we read that the Father has commissioned Jesus to reveal His beauty, His worth and His excellence to "His servants." That is the central pillar of the book.

- b. **A Revelation that was Given by God** – Those who argue that the book is irrelevant need to address the Lord with their opinion. God says that He gave it to us making Him responsible for its contents and message. I find it hard to agree with pop-Christianity that believes that God would waste His time and ours with a useless vision that serves no purpose except for the equipping of 7 churches in Asia Minor for an exaggerated crisis some 25 years after it allegedly happened.<sup>3</sup> To say that the book is meaningless for a final generation is not to disrespect the book but God Himself. The title of the book is "the revelation...given by God." The fact that God gave this to us must necessarily imply purpose and relevance. The One in whom is all wisdom and knowledge is not interested in proliferating useless apocalyptic hyperbole that has no real fulfillment.
- i. There is a 4-stage process by which the book was given. God gave it to Jesus; Jesus gave it to the angels; the angels gave to John; John gave it to us.
- c. **A Revelation that was Given to Us** – The object of revelation is Jesus. The source is God. And the recipient is us. God gave this to us. Explaining it away or ignoring it does not honor Him. How many of us know that it does not bring us honor when the gift we give to someone for their birthday or Christmas is ignored, rejected or

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<sup>3</sup> Many today argue that the book of Revelation was fulfilled in 70 AD during the Roman siege of Jerusalem. The problem with this theory is that the book was written around 90-95 AD; some 25 years after the fact. That's not prophecy, that's history. Moreover, the vision of the past tense crisis was wildly exaggerated and ridiculously communicated if it was meant to explain some sort of conflict with Rome.



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mistreated? The book of Revelation is a gift from God to those He loves.

3. Many people in the western world have been seduced by false teaching and are adamant about the idea that the book of Revelation is entirely irrelevant in any practical way. Meaning, it's alright if we believe it to be symbolic, historical or fulfilled. But we cannot say that it's future, literal or real. This mentality must be addressed and corrected.

B. The Central Message of the Book

***“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants...” (1:1a)***

1. It is the will of the Father to make known two things to us: (1) ***His Son*** Jesus Christ and (2) ***the things*** that must shortly take place. This is the person of Jesus and His plans to destroy wickedness and establish His kingdom on earth.
2. ***The central message of the book of Revelation is the beauty of Jesus and the reality of His return.*** The vision was given to us to awaken these things in our hearts.
3. There is a unique relationship between the beauty of Jesus and understanding eschatology. Our goal is not to understand events so much as it is to know the Man who is planning these events and orchestrating them. It's not one or the other. It's both.
4. Many people want to “just love Jesus” and let everything sort themselves out. But they will be unprepared when the storm comes.
5. And other people want to understand all the events that will occur in the end-times but are uninterested in studying the person and work of Jesus. And they too will be unprepared when the storm comes.

C. The Contents of the Book

***“...who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.” (1:2)***



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1. The term **“bore witness”** in the book always means “fearless public proclamation in the face of tremendous opposition.” (Osborne; pg. 56)
2. **The Word of God.** This phrase is found 7 times in the book (1:2, 9; 6:9; 17:17; 19:9; 13; 20:4). The apostle John was bearing witness to the word of God in two primary ways; he was bearing witness to (1) the person of Christ as the incarnate word of God (John 1:1-3) and (2) he was bearing witness to the written word of God. “The word of God is thought of in the Bible not merely as a means of communicating truth, but as an active, dynamic entity.”<sup>4</sup> It’s no coincidence that John opened his gospel with the grand statement of Jesus being “the Word.” In chapter 19 when he sees Jesus splitting the skies and leading a military procession into Jerusalem, the blood-stained Man on the horse is identified as “the Word of God.” On the road to Emmaus, Jesus understood that the way the human heart burns hottest is to open up the Scriptures and make the Person of the Messiah known. In the pursuit of end-time apostleship we are first loyal to the WORD OF GOD.
3. **The Testimony of Jesus Christ.** This phrase is found 6 times in the book (1:2, 9; 12:17; 19:10 [twice], 20:4). The testimony of Jesus is defined in 19:10 as being “the spirit of prophecy.” The vocation of the Holy Spirit in this age is to testify to the saints concerning the beauty of Jesus and the reality of His return. The Spirit of Christ was in John as it was in all the prophets of old who longed for consummation. The forerunner ministry is driven by this; this “testimony of Jesus.”

***...the prophets have inquired and searched carefully...searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To THEM it was revealed, not to themselves, but to us... (1 Peter 1:10-12)***

4. **All the things that he saw.** This phrase refers specifically to the end-time events that will be unique to the final generation that is alive on the earth at the return of the Lord. God saw it necessary to reveal these “things” to His people. And we must treat the book accordingly. That is, we should approach it knowing that it’s absolutely necessary to (1) hear, (2)

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<sup>4</sup> Ladd, pg. 23



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understand and (3) declare these things. The uniqueness of the events that will be released in the final generation will be so unimaginable and so unprecedented that if we do not take the book seriously now, learning how to prepare ourselves, we run the risk of being caught off guard when it occurs and being offended at the Lord because we lack understanding.

***<sup>21</sup> There will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world...nor ever shall be. 22 Unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved. (Mt. 24:21-22)***

D. What God Wants Us to do with the Book

Within the book are 7 beatitudes (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). This is the first. This one, along with one other, focuses on how we are to handle the book. Here in this verse we're told how the heart becomes prepared to digest (1) the word of God, (2) the testimony of Jesus and (3) the things which John saw (from verse 2). In other words, verse three tells us how to pursue authentic understanding of that which is contained in verse two.

***"Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near." (1:3)***

1. The three-fold promise of blessing presupposes the fact that we can understand the book of Revelation. Our goal in this community is to read, listen and keep the book of Revelation in such a way that the youngest, weakest and most immature can enter into an understanding and appreciation of the book. The following sessions will be spent attacking the idea that only scholars and full time Bible students can understand the book. Anyone and everyone can understand this book. All that is required is hunger and humility.

***At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will/good pleasure. (Matthew 11:25-26)***

2. ***Blessed is He Who Reads This Prophecy*** – This is the New Testament counterpart of that which was told to Moses and Joshua about the Law.



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Bind it to your eyelids and let it consume you. If you do it by the prescribed method you'll live with a burning heart. It's the call to have a Mary Bethany posture about the end of the age.

- a. We need to establish a culture where the book of Revelation is read aloud corporately for community reflection, digestion and agreement.
- b. It's not enough that we study at home or alone in the prayer room. We need to pursue it together.
- c. The communities that do not read this book aloud together in corporate settings forfeit so much. When the book goes unread and unmentioned we starve ourselves of the richest of "food." Jesus called the revelation of His return "food in due season." Remember, this book is about Jesus and His plan to take over the earth. Not reading it is not helpful.

***"Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food in due season?" (Matthew 24:45)***

3. ***Blessed is He Who Hears This Prophecy*** – This is the reception of divine insight by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. Hearing takes place when the spiritual senses of the person are awakened to the truths contained in the book and suddenly the content shifts from the realm of principles to be pondered to the place of living understanding that demands a response.
  - a. In the 7 letters Jesus will address every church by telling them that whoever has an ear **MUST** hear what the Spirit is saying. We must be given to seeing and hearing (Acts 4:20)
  - b. ***"Then He said to them, Take heed WHAT you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. 25 For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him." (Mk. 4:24-25)***



c. ***“Therefore take heed HOW you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him.” (Luke 8:18)***

4. ***Blessed is He Who Keeps This Prophecy*** – To “keep” means to “guard” in the Greek. This charge is for individuals and corporate bodies to guard the contents of this book within their hearts; meaning, treat it like you’d treat money or expensive jewelry. Treat is according to its value. It’s precious and it’s a gift. God’s gift to us is not simply meant to be understood; it is to be kept. To love Jesus is to keep the book of Revelation.

***“Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me.” (Jn. 14:23-24)***

- a. We “keep the book” is by taking it seriously
- b. We “keep the book” by treasuring the Jesus we read in it
- c. We “keep the book” by declaring it faithfully; even unto death
- d. We “keep the book” by being persistent in our study of it over the years
- e. We “keep the book” by not succumbing to the temptation to explain the reality of the return of Jesus away; Peter says that people do this not because of bad teaching but because of the lust in their hearts.
- f. We “keep the book” by forging a culture that cherishes it for the next generation

